DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 565 EA 031 092

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TITLE	Participation of Teachers in the School Management: A Reality in Current Czech Schools?
PUB DATE	1997-09-00
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Management (Orebro, Sweden, September 18-21, 1997). Partly based on findings from research project, "Management of Czech Schools: With or Without Teachers' Participation?" supported by the Open Society Institute/Higher Education Support Program.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Administrative Organization; *Decision Making; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Management Systems; Participative Decision Making; Performance Factors; Public Schools; *School Effectiveness; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Morale; Teacher Rights
IDENTIFIERS	Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that focused on teacher participation in decision making, part of a larger study that looked at management styles in Czech basic schools. There was particular interest in areas of school functioning that went beyond the level of common teachers' work in the classroom. Questionnaires were submitted to school heads and to teachers (N=171) from 9 basic schools (1st through 9th grade). Research methods included interviews with school heads and their deputies, group interviews, observation, and the study of documents. Findings from the study correspond to those from more extensive studies in the field. They indicate that Czech teachers cannot be generally regarded as the ones "interested only in their direct work in the classrooms." Quite often they declare their interest in participation in some whole-school issues, and in issues directly related to education and schooling work. However, quite often, the decision-making process is more on the operational level than on a strategic one. Results also suggest that teachers' participation at the decision-making level does not guarantee better work in the school. (DFR)

ED 455 565

Paper presented at the ENIRDEM (European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Management) conference, Örebrö, Sweden, September 18-21, 1997.

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EA 031092

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Teachers' participation in the decision making about whole-school level issues

The paper presented is based on a part of results gained from broader research project focused on management styles in Czech basic schools. For the purpose of this paper we selected a part which concerns directly teachers' participation at the decision making processes in schools. We believe teachers' participation is a condition of autonomous school development in a democratic society. We have been focused on areas of schools' operation teachers do take part in the decision making processes. Particular interest represented for us areas of school functioning which go beyond the level of common teachers' work in a classroom with pupils. Results of this part of the survey have been compared with teachers' interest to participate at the decision making processes in particular areas of school operation, and with the level of teachers' satisfaction both with their profession, and with functioning of their school. In these connections we also inform about teachers' views on democracy in schools and on the role of heads and teachers themselves in the school decision making processes.

Research methods and sources of the data

In our survey we have used both qualitative, and quantitative techniques of the data collection. We developed two slightly different questionnaires (submitted to two groups of respondents: school heads, and teachers), further we used semistandardized individual interviews with school heads and their deputies, group interview, participating observation, and study of the documents (analysis of school structure schemes, in particular).

The sample consists of 171 teachers from 9 basic schools (1st-9th grades) in Brno who filled the questionnaire in May 1997 (the same did their heads a little earlier). Both questionnaires „What is the decision making process like in schools?" were quite similar and it was therefore possible to compare answers of heads and teachers. The return rate (in case of teachers) amounted 52%, yet it varied greatly among schools (from 22% to 85%). There are 149 women and 22 men in the sample. As for the length of their teaching career, 19% respondents have 1-3 years of teaching practice, 19% of others teach 4-10 years, another group of 19% teachers teach 11-20 years, and finally 40% of teachers have a practice longer than 21 years.

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What areas of school operation teachers participate in and in what extent?

We have divided areas of school operation arbitrarily into four blocks and tested their coherence with correlation analysis. As a result, we have got four areas: the very process of education and schooling, personnel, the development of whole-school strategies, and the development of school external relations. Within these four areas we have distinguished 4-5 subareas of activity:

1. process of education and schooling
- selection of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials
- selection of adequate teaching methods and procedures
- solving study problems of individual pupils
- provisions for meeting special education needs of pupils

2. personnel
- hiring new staff members
- division of work to staff
- solving complaints of individual teachers
- setting the level of individual teachers' salaries
- disciplinary actions against teachers failing to meet their duties

3. development of whole-school strategies
- setting up school strategies of education and schooling
- formulating principles and guidelines of pupils' discipline in classrooms
- planning school material resources development
- planning school budget

4. development of school external relations
- setting up principles of communication with parents
- development of relations with other external subjects of the school
- representation of the school in the outer world
- organizing programs of pupils' extramural activity

First area concerns activities most often and directly related to the teaching profession in the Czech millieu - teachers' direct work with pupils in the classroom. It is saturated with education and schooling activities of teachers. At the other end, there is an area of the development of the whole-school strategies which has its education dimension (school as education and schooling institution), but also economic, material resources, and other dimensions. The third area is the one of personnel (focus on the inner functionning of a school, on specific interpersonal relations, on legal working issues). Finally, there are school external relations (decisions oriented outside the schools).

All activities (subareas) within four areas mentioned were commented by teachers in two levels: do teachers take part in the decision making processes about issues related to these areas? are they interested to participate? Heads had their opportunity to express their view at teachers participation in the same two levels. The figure No. 1 shows in what areas

teachers claim to take part in the decision making. The same figure also shows teachers' interest to participate in the decisions concerned.

Fig. No. 1:**Indicators of teachers' participation in school decision making and their interest to participate**

1. process of education and schooling	**participation (%)**	**interest to participate (%)**
Selection of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials	89	93
Selection of adequate teaching methods and procedures	89	91
Solving study problems of individual pupils	92	94
Provisions for meeting special educational needs of pupils	59	73
2. personnel	**participation (%)**	**interest to participate (%)**
hiring new staff members	13	35
division of work to staff	18	39
solving complaints of individual teachers	14	37
setting the level of individual teachers' salaries	4	19
disciplinary actions against teachers failing to meet their duties	7	19
3. development of school strategies	**participation (%)**	**interest to participate (%)**
setting school strategies of education and schooling	61	83
formulating principles and guidlines of pupils' discipline in classroom	82	96
planning school budget	5	38
planning school material resources development	48	85
4. development of school external relations	**participation (%)**	**interest to participate (%)**
setting up principles of communication with parents	58	80
development of relations with other external subjects of the school	13	29
representation of the school in the outer world	73	80
organizing programs of pupils' extramural activity	46	55

All the data indicate that most often teachers take part in decisions related to the area of education and schooling (almost a half of respondents say they take part actively in all 4 subareas within area of education and schooling). On the contrary, the lowest possibility to participate have teachers in case of decisions related to personnel (almost two thirds of them claim they cannot take part at none of the 5 subareas concerned). In case of 4 subareas of the development of the whole-school strategies only 5% respondents take part in all of them, while 12% of others do not participate at any of the subareas. It is surprising, as two subareas of this area are directly related to educational and schooling work of teachers (setting education and schooling strategies of the school, setting principles of pupils behaviour in the classroom), although they concern higher level than the one of an individual classroom.

If we compare mean percentage of participation in the decision making in four areas mentioned, we can get similar results:

Fig. No. 2: **Mean percentage of participation in decision making in four areas:**

- proces of education and schooling: 82%
- personnel: 11%
- development of school strategies: 49%
- development of school external relations: 48%

The highest level of teachers' participation is clearly in issues of the process of education and schooling; on the contrary, involvement in personnel issues seems to be the lowest, while in case of the other two areas results indicate a position of „somewhere in the middle".

Believing that teachers' participation should take place in all areas of the school's operation, we can conclude that typically teacher in current Czech basic school is a person who most of all participate in decisions related directly to his/her classroom work with pupils, while in case of other decisions (including some related quite closely to education and schooling) his/her participation is not that high, as might be useful.

Are teachers interested in participation?

Practically in all areas mentioned teachers expressed their higher interest to take part in the decision making processes than they can enjoy a chance to participate in the reality. Some differences between the reality and ideal are not very high here, the others seem to be considerable. It is well seen, for instance, in school budget planning and in case of all the

subareas of development of the whole-school strategy. This difference has been proven statistically, too.

Fig. No. 3: **Mean percentage of interest to participate in decision making in four areas:**

- proces of education and schooling: 88%
- personnel: 30%
- development of school strategies: 76%
- development of school external relations: 61%

We expected that the influence of this discrepancy will be expressed in the level of teachers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the functioning of their school. There was found statistically significant relation between these two phenomena in the area of the development of whole-school strategies (Spearman coefficient of serial corelation = -0,35; 0,001), in personnel (-0,27), and in the development of school external relations (-0,21). In other words, those teachers who are more interested in their participation at the decision making than they can participate in reality are less satisfied with the functioning of their school.

Can the discrepancy mentioned indicate some influence on the teachers' satisfaction with their profession? We have not found any relation to that in our sample (process of education and schooling: -0,03, personnel: -0,09, the development of whole-school strategies: -0,15, the development of school external relations: -0,02).

Generally, teachers who participate more at the school-level decision making express their higher safistaction with the school functioning (Spearman coefficient =-0,32). In individual areas the statistical coherence is as follows: personnel: -0,23, the development of whole-school strategies: -0,36, the development of school external relations: -0,31. We have not found the statistical coherence between the extent of participation and the level of satisfaction with teaching profession.

Who makes strategic decisions in schools?

Under the heading „strategic decisions" we understand the ones having a long-term and fundamental importance for the school development.

Fig. No. 4:

Head decides

	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
Teachers' opinion (%)	7	9	21	34	29
heads'opinion (%)	23	10	15	31	21

Head decides together with his/her deputies

	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
teachers' opinion (%)	2	6	22	44	26
heads' opinion (%)	5	3	24	32	37

Deputies of the head decide

	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
teachers' opinion (%)	28	36	26	10	1
heads' opinion (%)	68	24	8	0	0

Head decides together with his/her deputies and middle managers

	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
teachers'opinion (%)	13	23	34	22	9
heads' opinion (%)	16	18	42	16	8

Head decides together with all teaching staff

	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
teachers' opinion (%)	12	26	34	16	12
heads' opinion (%)	16	22	24	22	16

Head decides together with all school staff

	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
teachers' opinion (%)	33	28	25	9	5
heads' opinion (%)	44	13	21	13	10

The data from the figure No. 4 suggest a picture of the school as a place where formal responsibility and powers of school leaders and teachers are sharply split. With regard to the definition of participative model of school management one could expect higher teachers' involvement in strategic school decisions. We would expect it also with regard to teachers' declared involvement in 4 areas of school functioning. The strategic decisions (a long-term and principial ones) could and probably should be more consulted with teachers and other people in schools and later decided by a broader school management body, in best case by all teachers (employees) of the school. Both teachers and heads expressed in our sample that strategic decisions are most often decided by the head him-/herself, eventually by the head together with deputy heads. The role of middle managers, teachers and other school employees does not seem to be strong enough here. Especially middle managers could often play a vital role in the development of broader participation within the school, though, if it is to be based and come out of teachers' work in a classroom.

The difference between teachers' involvement in 4 areas of schools' functions and the extent they claim to be involved in strategic decisions could also partly come out, we believe, out of teachers' tendency to declare lower level of their chances to get involved while speaking about decision making processes in their school generally. When it comes down to the specific areas of their activity and possible involvement in related decisions, more teachers start to „discover" and consequently claim the different (higher) level of their

involvement, especially in case of some decisions concerning their education and schooling activity.

If to compare the views on democracy in schools and ways of decision making in case of strategic issues, we can see that at schools where strategic decisions are mostly decided by the head there are quite often present teachers' views that schools are not managed in a democratic way (Spearman coefficient of serie corelation = -0,31). On the contrary, where strategic decisions are often decided by the head together with most or all teaching staff, teachers more frequently find the school a democratic institution (Spearman coefficient = 0,36).

Do teachers find school a democratic institution?

Teachers were asked to express their agreement/disagreement with the following statement: *„Sometimes our schools are said to be institutions existing in a democratic millieu, but the ones where democracy stops in front of the school gate. They are believed not to be managed democratically, viewed as a place where rather authoritarian style of management prevails"*.

Respondents of our sample expressed most often their disagreement with this statement (41%), part of others did not have clear opinion (38%), smaller group of respondents agreed with the statement (21%).

School as a democratic institution was more often perceived by respondents-men, by teachers who are satisfied with the teaching profession, and by those satisfied with their school's functioning. Mostly this opinion had also teachers with the career in teaching of 21 and more years. On the contrary, beginning teachers agreed more often with the statement offered.

How teachers perceive their and their head's role in the decision making processes?

Teachers also expressed on the scale 1-10 the level of their agreement/disagreement with some statements focused on teachers' and heads' role in the school life. The statement *„Final responsibility for the school has the head, that is why he/she must personally control everything what is happening in school"* was agreed by 58% respondents (more often by women and those who are satisfied with their profession and with functioning of their school).

With the statement *„It is neither possible, nor desirable to decide on school matters by all the teachers"* agreed 58% respondents. The main difference was the length of the teaching career (significantly more often agreed teachers with 21 and more years of career, while significantly more often disagreed beginning teachers, the ones with 1-3 years of teaching career).

Statement *„Teachers should care for matters of teaching, the rest is the competence of school leaders"* was disagreed by 48% respondents (more often by those dissatisfied with their profession, with functioning of their school, and especially by a group of respondents-beginning teachers). On the contrary, agreement was found especially among more experienced teachers (11-20 years of career).

Statement *„In fact, it is convenient for teachers not to have to decide about things directly not concerning their work in the classroom"* was agreed by 28% of teachers,

disagreed by 29% of others. The biggest group represented respondents without clearly shaped opinion. The most frequent disagreement among beginning teachers.

We can see, there prevails an agreement with a strong position of heads at Czech basic schools. On the other hand, there is a tendency of at least some groups of teachers not to stay only in education and schooling issues related directly to their work with pupils in classrooms. Beginning teachers are the strongest group, as for the second tendency mentioned.

Discussion

Our findings correspond with the ones of many more extensive studies in the field (Alluto, Belasco, 1973; Smylie, 1992; and more). It seems to be evident that „deprivation" of the interest to participate in decision about whole-school matters has many relations to the general teachers' activity, their perception of their role, and especially to their satisfaction in the school millieu. Our findings indicate that Czech teachers cannot be generally marked as the ones „interested only in their direct work in the classrooms". Quite often they declare their interest in participation in some whole-school issues, too, and especially in case of some issues directly related to the education and schooling work they do take actively part in decision making processes (although it all happens more often on the level of operational decisions, than the strategic ones, as indicate other data from the survey). At the same time, we can say that the most meaningful way of development of teachers participation at the whole-school level issues and decision making processes seems to be the one coming out of the teaching work of teachers. Meaningful participation development should probably be based on it.

We are well aware, however, that teachers' participation itself at the decision making does not guarantee better work of the school (see Conley, Schmidle, Shedd, 1988; and more). A vital role play many other „contextual" factors, too.

Implications

We would need many more findings to be able to make broader conclusions about teachers' participation in the school decision making processes and about prevailing style of Czech basic schools' management. These conclusions should also be based on the data about specifics of school environment (school size, school management team, role of the head, organizational conditions for shared decision making, etc.), and also on views of all the people involved (heads, their deputies, teachers, etc.) on the need and use of participatory management style at schools. We have conducted such a procedure in our broader research on management styles at Czech basic schools, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

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